

ICA  
VOG FOR IOP/FPI  
NEWS ANALYSIS NO. 1-0002  
CHARLES MEDD

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ELECTION '76: THE CARTER PHENOMENON

ANNCR:

TWO EVENTS IN THE PAST FEW DAYS HAVE BROUGHT FIFTY-ONE-YEAR-OLD JIMMY CARTER A LOT CLOSER TO THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY'S PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION: THE FIRST, HIS OVERWHELMING VICTORY IN THE PENNSYLVANIA PRIMARY, THE OTHER, HUBERT HUMPHREY'S DECISION NOT TO BECOME AN ACTIVE CANDIDATE. CHARLES MEDD TAKES A LOOK AT THE REMARKABLE CARTER CAMPAIGN.

VOICE:

UNTIL A FEW MONTHS AGO, ONLY A HANDFUL OF AMERICANS HAD EVER HEARD OF PLAINS, GEORGIA, AND ONLY A FEW MORE COULD RECOGNIZE THE NAME OF ITS BEST-KNOWN INHABITANT. BUT TODAY THE TINY HAMLET OF PLAINS -- POPULATION: LESS THAN SEVEN HUNDRED -- IS NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS FOR ONE OF THE MOST AMAZING POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS IN RECENT MEMORY, AND ITS NUMBER ONE CITIZEN, WHO GROWS PEANUTS SIX DAYS A WEEK AND TEACHES SUNDAY SCHOOL THE SEVENTH, MAY WELL BE THE NEXT PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES. JIMMY CARTER IS STILL A LONG WAY FROM GRASPING HIS PARTY'S NOMINATION, AND EVEN FURTHER FROM THE WHITE HOUSE, BUT HE HAS COME SO FAR, SO FAST, NO ONE IS SURE JUST WHERE OR WHEN THE CARTER BANDWAGON WILL STOP.

AT FIRST, HE WAS UNIVERSALLY DISMISSED AS AN AMBITIOUS YOUNG SOUTHERNER WHO AT BEST WOULD CHALLENGE ALABAMA'S GEORGE WALLACE FOR REGIONAL SUPPORT AND, IF SUCCESSFUL, MIGHT QUALIFY AS A VICE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE. BUT WHEN THE FORMER GOVERNOR OF GEORGIA NOT ONLY STOPPED WALLACE IN THE SOUTH AND THEN GAVE THE SAME TREATMENT TO OTHER DEMOCRATS IN THE NORTH,

THESE SAME EXPERTS BEGAN TAKING ANOTHER LOOK AT JIMMY CARTER.

WHAT THEY FOUND WAS A HIGHLY SKILLED AND SELF-CONFIDENT POLITICIAN WHO TWO YEARS AGO EXAMINED THE FIELD OF PARTY CONTENDERS AND SAID TO HIMSELF, WHY NOT ME. WHILE NO ONE WAS WATCHING, MISTER CARTER BEGAN PUTTING TOGETHER A SMALL BUT COMPETENT CAMPAIGN ORGANIZATION AND A STRATEGY FOR RUNNING IN VIRTUALLY EVERY CONTEST FOR CONVENTION DELEGATES. FOR A POLITICAL UNKNOWN, THAT STRATEGY WAS VITAL TO CARTER'S HOPES OF GAINING NATIONAL RECOGNITION, AND REPEATED SUCCESS SOON TOOK CARE OF THE RECOGNITION FACTOR.

BUT SUCCESS, OF COURSE, DEPENDED LESS ON STRATEGY THAN ON THE CARTER IMAGE AND HIS MESSAGE. AT A TIME WHEN VOTERS WERE TURNING THEIR BACKS ON THE EVERY-DAY POLITICIAN AND HIS CONSTANT FLOW OF PROMISES, CARTER'S FRESH FACE AND HIS QUICK REFUSAL TO PROMISE EVERYTHING TO EVERYBODY EARNED HIM INSTANT ATTENTION. AND WHILE HIS RIVALS COMPLAINED THAT CARTER LACKED SPECIFIC ANSWERS, THE VOTERS APPLAUDED HIS CANDOR.

ON THE BROADER ISSUES, JIMMY CARTER SOUNDS LIKE A MIDDLE-OF-THE-ROAD DEMOCRAT. HE FAVORS DETENTE AND BELIEVES THIS COUNTRY CAN MAINTAIN ITS MILITARY DEFENSE SYSTEM WITH MORE EFFICIENCY AND LESS MONEY. HE ALSO BACKS HIS PARTY'S TRADITIONAL COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE ALTHOUGH HE DOUBTS THEY CAN BE ACHIEVED BY GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION ALONE.

WHAT IS PERHAPS MOST DIFFERENT ABOUT THIS POLITICAL OUTSIDER IS FOUND IN HIS BASIC CAMPAIGN THEME -- THAT THE AMERICAN PEOPLE DESERVE A GOVERNMENT THAT IS AS HONEST AND DECENT AS THEY THEMSELVES ARE. FROM ANOTHER POLITICIAN, SUCH WORDS WOULD SOUND SIMPLISTIC AND PIOUS. FROM JIMMY CARTER,

THEY HAVE FOR MANY AMERICANS A RING OF AUTHENTICITY. FOR  
IN THE EYES OF ONE SEASONED REPORTER, THIS NATION IS  
SUFFERING LESS FROM POLITICAL CRISIS THAN A SPIRITUAL  
CRISIS, AND JIMMY CARTER -- THE SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHER FROM  
PLATT'S, GEORGIA -- IS THE ONE CANDIDATE WHO SEEMS TO UNDERSTAND.

L/RCS